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ABSTRACT

Participants in this study were couples representing three employment groups. The first, mono-employed, consisted of couples with an employed husband and a wife who was at home full time. The dual employed group comprised an employed husband and wife, and the third group were employed husbands and wives both of whom had doctoral degrees. Participants were administered a questionnaire, including philosophical orientation and actual role behavior. Results indicated that for both measures, professional women had the lowest degree of sex-linked role behavior and housewives, the highest. Men showed less predictability with regard to philosophical orientation. Actual role behavior was consistent with the philosophical orientation of their wives. (Author)

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Sex-Linked Role Behavior in Three Employment Groups

Robin A. Deutsch

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Since the beginning of the 20th century, the number of women in the labor market has dramatically increased. Forty per cent of all workers are now women, including more than half the women in most age groups, 16 and over.. The number of married women in the labor force has more than doubled since 1950, bringing the married female labor force to slightly over 20% of all women workers. The most current statistics from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that in over 50% of all marital units, both the husband and wife are employed outside the home.

Concommitant has been a changing consciousness concerning women's roles in society. It is unlikely that men or women have arrived in the mid-1970's without some thought to their respective roles, both within the family and society at large. While some family units have felt a need to experiment or change their life style in order to be more responsive to mutual needs and growth, changes for most families tend to be more subtle. Sex-linked behavior may decrease with each partner accepting responsibilities for tasks not previously considered masculine or feminine.

Current sociological and psychological literature suggest three types of family role structures. The first,

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the traditional family, is described as one where the husband and wife are committed to his career, even though the wife may be employed. If, for any reason, an outside job comes into conflict with household commitments, she would feel pressured to forego outside employment.

At the other end of the continuum, researchers have identified the egalitarian family. Although this term is used differently by different authors, the egalitarian family is generally described as a unit where division of labor is not sex related and the biological sex of each spouse is minimized. There is no primary importance attached to the career of either spouse and both are equally involved in their respective profession and have equal effect on familial decision making.

The third family unit is the neo-traditional family where the husband and wife share the breadwinning role, although the husband is viewed as the primary breadwinner. Career support is offered by the husband because the woman is viewed as more interesting and enjoyable and she is adequately able to integrate both home and career. Domestic activities are still viewed as the wife's responsibility although the husband may help out around the house (Poloma & Garland, 1971).

A consistent thread running through the literature indicates that the role behavior of the husband and wife in the American family has changed (Bebbington, 1973;

Holmstrom, 1972; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1969). This exploratory study attempted to further investigate and clarify some of the changes that have taken place. It focussed particularly on sex-linked role behavior in three types of family constellations: mono-employed, dual employed, and dual professional. The dual employed group would have the same characteristics as previously described for the neo-traditional family unit.

Based on previous research, the following predictions were made:

1. In comparison to the two other groups, the dual professionals will have less sex-linked role behavior, although sex-role stereotyping will not be fully eliminated in this group.

2. The mono-employed group will exhibit the highest degree of sex-linked role behavior and the dual employed group will show an intermediate level of sex-linked role behavior.

Method

The participants were 30 volunteers, residing in the Bay Area, who were recruited through acquaintances of the author and were unknown to each other. Each couples was informed that this was a study of the contemporary American family.

The mono-employed group consisted of a working husband and a wife who was not employed outside the home. The dual employed group was made up of an employed husband and an employed wife. Minimally, each participant was a high

school graduate. In the third group, the dual professional group, both the husband and wife were employed full time and had one of the following degrees: Ph.D., M.D. or J.D. All couples were married for a minimum of three years and had at least one child under the age of 13 living in the home. Income was not a criteria, although only white collar workers were included.

Five couples in each group were administered a questionnaire which consisted of items designed to differentiate between traditional and egalitarian marriages. It draws primarily on demographic data, including composition of the family unit, and educational level completed. In addition to a part which explored the individual's philosophical orientation toward sex-linked role behavior and a self report of actual role behavior, there are questions concerning each participant's decision to marry and their reservations about marriage.

After contacting each participating couple by phone, the questionnaires were mailed and were later returned to the author in a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Results and Discussion

The participants in this study were a fairly homogeneous group. The average age of women participants in all three groups was 34.5 years. While the average age for men in the three groups was 35.5 years. The range for all

participants, with the exception of two. was from 26 to 39 years. The two remaining participants were 48 years old and were in the dual professional group.

The dual employed group averaged the lowest number of children, 1.7, while the mono-employed group averaged 3.2 children. The dual professional group was intermediate for the number of children.

Decisions to and Reservations About Marriage

This section of the questionnaire included 16 items concerning decisions to marry and 16 items concerning reservations about marriage. These were broken down into three areas of consideration: first, internal motivations such as "My desire to have children","My desire for an enduring relationship" or "My feeling that I might never have a better opportunity". Second, are less cogent internal motivations such as "X's ability to be a good parent" and third, external motivations such as encouragement from family or friends or the spouses potential financial prospects.

In the first section, decisions to marry, women in all three groups tended to endorse the same items, with the exception of items concerning elements external to the couple, that is, the husband's potential earning ability, persuasion by family or friends. These items seemed much more salient for women in the mono-employed group and

much less salient for women in the dual professional group.

Women in the mono-employed group endorsed the least number of reservations about marriage while dual professional women endorsed substantially more reservations than women in either of the two groups.

Women in all three groups endorsed more reservations than men in any group. Almost no men in any of the three groups expressed reservations about marrying. There was no difference for men in the three groups concerning decisions to marry.

Philosophical Orientation and Actual Role Behavior

Results indicate that when viewed as a unit, dual professional couples had the largest number of shared tasks while the mono-employed group had the lowest amount of role sharing. The dual employed group was intermediate for role sharing behavior. In addition, the mono-employed group also reports the highest number of wife alone tasks and the lowest number of husband alone tasks. Both areas seem to suggest that the dual professional group is the least traditional while the mono-employed group is the most traditional.

However, when viewed by sex, results indicate that for philosophical orientation and actual role behavior women in the dual professional group showed the least amount of sex-linked role behavior with the mono-employed group displaying the highest. It is not surprising, of course, that full time homemakers report such a high level of actual

sex-linked role behavior, but the fact is that such women also report a highly sex-linked philosophical orientation. This suggests a strong commitment to homemaking and childrearing as a life task as the right and proper vehicle for them.

Philosophical orientation for dual professional women indicate a high degree of egalitarianism although reported actual sex role behavior suggests that sex-linked role behavior is not entirely eliminated and would therefore appear to approximate the neo-traditional group as previously described. Dual employed women maintain an intermediate position for both philosophical orientation and actual role behavior. Differences between groups, when analyzed by a χ^2, were significant at the .02 level.

Results for male participants are much less definitive and men showed much less predictabilility with regard to philosophical orientation. Unlike the women, men were almost equally interspersed between sex-linked, neutral, and non-sex-linked responses regardless of employment group, and philosophical orientation. Differences between groups, when analyzed by χ^2, were not significant. Men in the dual professional group report actual role behavior that suggests a minimum of sex-linked role behavior, but their philosophical orientation would suggest that they do not have an equally strong philosophical commitment.

The men in the mono-employed group reported a philosophical orientation closer to the dual professional men, but actually, their role behavior is quite sex-linked.

The consistent thread running through each of the groups is that men report actual role behavior that is more consistent with the philosophical orientation of their wives than with their own philosophical orientation.

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